

STATEMENT OF ROGER L. BENSEY
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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND
RESEARCH

November 14, 2001

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss the Buena Vista watershed project that was developed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and is being considered for authorization. I am Lee Bensey, Director, at the NRCS Watersheds and Wetlands Division.

Proposed watershed projects with an estimated Federal contribution to construction costs in excess of \$5,000,000 and no single structure exceeding 4,000 acre feet of total capacity require approval of this committee and the committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition of the Senate. I am pleased to appear before you today to request approval of the Buena Vista Watershed in Virginia.

Buena Vista Watershed

The Buena Vista Watershed project is located in Rockbridge County, Virginia and has a drainage area of 11,850 acres and includes the City of Buena Vista. The population within the project area is approximately 6,400. The City of Buena Vista and the Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District are sponsors of the project.

The major problem in the watershed is repetitive flooding from four mountain streams causing overland flow and ponding problems throughout Buena Vista. Previous efforts to maintain stream capacity have been rendered ineffective due to the recurring deposition of gravel, cobbles and debris during flood events. Analyses indicate that a 100-year frequency storm floods 245 residences, 70 commercial properties, numerous roads, bridges and utilities and result in over \$11.8 million dollars in damages. The average annual damage is \$1,450,000.

The plan consists of multiple works of improvements, which address stream channel capacity enhancement and debris removal. The measures include 7 debris basins, modifying or removing 10 bridges/culverts, construction 500 feet of concrete floodwall and upgrading 220 feet of earthen berm, and improving 6170 feet of stream channel. The estimated total cost of the project is \$7.19 million, of which the federal share is \$6.55 million. The benefit/cost ratio is 1.5:1.

If the Buena Vista Watershed Plan is implemented, it will reduce the average annual flood damages by 61 percent and approximately 130 buildings will be flood free during the 100-year flood event.

I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present this project and ask for its approval. It is quite clear that the vision and needs of the local communities have been well crafted and articulated in this proposal. The local sponsors have worked hard to define their goals and hope for the future their community.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again for the opportunity to appear. I would be happy to answer any questions the subcommittee might have.